

Township Focus

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS ASSOCIATION

Outdoor recreation fosters quality of life, economic development



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Chipping away

With September now here, the Legislature is back in Lansing with what is expected to be a very busy fall session. Several issues at the forefront will attempt to chip away at local authority—including the siting of sand and gravel mining operations.

This legislative attempt has been debated each legislative session over the past several sessions, and was introduced and discussed once again earlier this year. MTA thanks all members who engaged with their lawmakers to retain a local voice in the process.

This issue is not going away, and MTA and our coalition partners have worked to offer a comprehensive and fair way forward—to finally come to a mutually acceptable and workable approach that ensures reliable permitting and reasonable operations for sand and gravel mining sites. We also strongly support a state-funded geological survey—as done in other states—to identify the location of aggregate deposits. However, a resolution requires **all parties** to be willing to discuss a solution with **all being willing to compromise**. Thus far, that has not been the approach taken by those pursuing the legislation that would forever change the quality of life in communities, the environment and the rights of all property owners.

During these legislative debates, the aggregate industry has referred to many local officials as “bad actors”—despite overwhelmingly positive working relationships that exist across the state, and across the decades, between host communities and sand and gravel mine operators. Legislation proponents also utilize a decades-old list in an attempt to illustrate these “bad actors”—when, in fact, many of the examples have been resolved by local officials, were the result of court decisions, or involve permits that were denied as a result of incomplete applications.

As township officials, you are the democratically elected representatives of your local community—no one knows the residents’ interests and priorities better than you. In parts of our state, aggregate mining sites are welcome, important parts of the economy. Conversely, in others, communities are seeking to ensure development makes sense in the best locations for a wide variety of land uses. Some townships, cities and counties have zoned specific areas to allow sand and

gravel operations. Key is balancing the rights and interests of the commercial, agricultural, industrial and residential property owners for all residents, business owners and visitors in a community.

You have been elected by your residents to balance and protect their mutual interests. You are not “bad actors” nor should you have your local authority stripped away. You serve to make the most informed decisions to manage your township’s present and future. The truth—that local officials and local mine operators have good working relationships—is hidden in the sand and gravel legislative debate. We simply cannot eliminate siting and operational controls, and allow our residents’ best interest and that of our environment to be overridden.

Local officials want to have a positive and productive working relationship with the mine owners and operators, and one that retains local siting and operational controls. MTA and our coalition partners, representing governmental associations and environmental organizations, will continue to work for a mutually acceptable and workable approach that ensures reliable permitting and reasonable operations for sand and gravel mining sites. We urge the Legislature—the democratically elected representatives of our regions—to examine the compromise proposal and enact a fair, logical and lasting solution to this issue. And, we encourage you to engage in any legislative action alerts this fall on sand and gravel mining and other legislation that would preempt local authority.



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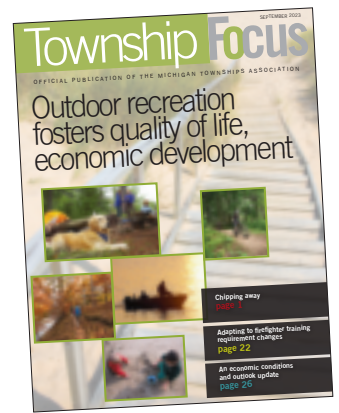
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mission statement

The Michigan Townships Association advances local democracy by fostering township leadership and public policy essential for a strong and vibrant Michigan.



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featured articles

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The great outdoors: Outdoor recreation fosters township quality of life, economic development

Across the state, townships are tackling recreational projects large and small in an effort to improve quality of life for local residents, spur economic development and drive tourism dollars into rural communities. Township efforts—and a lot of cooperation, vision and hard work—help put plans into action, and make a difference for residents and visitors alike.

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The four Cs: Adapting to firefighter training requirement changes

Some townships are sounding the alarm about 2021 changes to firefighter training requirements. Adapting to these changes requires knowledge on the part of the township, and consideration of cooperation, collaboration and more when determining how best to provide this important community service.



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EARLY VOTING RESOURCES

Model early voting agreements, plan available



Following voter approval of Proposal 2022-2 last November, all municipalities must offer nine days of early voting for every statewide and federal election, beginning with the 2024 presidential primary (municipalities *may* offer early voting in other elections). Townships can operate early voting on their own, through

a municipal agreement to offer jointly with other municipalities, or through a county agreement in which the county will conduct and oversee the early voting. In addition, early voting plans must be submitted to the county by the township if it is conducting early voting on its own, or by the coordinator of a municipal agreement.

The state Bureau of Elections now has model municipal and county agreement templates, as well as model early voting plan templates. Both are available in the BOE's eLearning Center (via www.michigan.gov/elections).

The BOE also recently shared deadlines associated with early voting for the presidential primary election *if* it takes place on Feb. 27 (while the law was changed earlier in the year to hold the presidential primary on Feb. 27, the bill did not receive immediate effect and thus the date is still not certain):

- **Sept. 25:** County clerks must notify their municipal clerks if they intend to offer early voting through a county agreement.
- **Sept. 30:** Municipal clerks must notify their county clerks whether they will conduct early voting as a single municipality, enter into a municipal agreement, or enter into a county agreement.
- **Oct. 25:** County and municipal agreements must be finalized and signed.
- **Oct. 30:** Single municipalities and municipal agreement coordinators must submit early voting plans to their county clerk.
- **Nov. 9:** County clerks must submit their municipalities' early voting plans to the secretary of state.

Continue to watch MTA publications, including our weekly *Township Insights* e-newsletter, and our Proposal 2022-2 webpage on www.michigantownships.org (access via "MTA On the Issues" under the "Advocacy" tab) for further updates and information as it becomes available.

EDUCATING YOUTH

Township officials can head back to school this fall, too!

Students across the state are returning to the classroom for a new academic year.

Back-to-school time provides an opportunity for township officials to reach out to your area schools to offer to share information, insights and experiences about the value of township

government—and the role it plays in residents' lives every day. And MTA can help! We have tools to take into the classroom, for all grade levels, at www.michigantownships.org (click on "Tools for Teachers" under the "About Townships" tab). You can also find a quick three-minute "10 Facts about Michigan Townships" video that you can show in the classroom.

Most civics or government classes or lessons do not go into depth about township government—if it is discussed at all! By talking with students in your area schools, you can help spread the message of what townships are—and how they positively impact students, parents and businesses. September is the perfect time to call or email your local school superintendent, principals or government teacher to let them know you are available as a resource. Offer to come to the classroom to make a presentation about township government (or you could "visit" classes virtually over Zoom!), or ask if any other leaders in your township would be willing to do so. Even if you or your township has been invited to make a presentation in years past, it's always a good idea to remind a teacher that you are available to talk with the class each year.

By putting a "face" on local government, you are helping give students an accessible opportunity to talk with you about your various roles and responsibilities as a township official and the day-to-day operations of the form of government that represents more than 52% of Michigan's residents. You may even help to inspire students to get more involved in their local community—taking part in programs, registering to vote (and remember 16- and 17-year-olds can serve as election inspectors!), or even running for elected office in the future.

While in the classroom, discuss topics that students can relate to. Talk about fire and police protection, library services, and even local roads. As a township leader, you are the expert on township government. So share that expertise and go back to school this fall—and throughout the year as well. Your efforts can have an impact on the life of a student and the future of your community.





ARPA UPDATE

New U.S. Treasury interim rule expands eligible uses for ARPA funds

Townships that have not yet obligated their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocation or that did not choose the standard allowance option to use up to \$10 million of ARPA dollars for general government services now have a few more eligible uses for the funds. Under a new interim rule released by U.S. Treasury in August, the following uses are now also eligible:


- **Emergency relief from national disasters** (including the negative economic effects of natural disasters)—According to the U.S. Treasury overview of the interim rule, this includes firefighting, search and rescue, emergency repairs, snow removal, and more when responding to a designated or declared natural disaster. The interim rule also outlines eligible uses for mitigation activities for future natural disasters.
- **Surface transportation infrastructure**—This allowance includes various pathways for recipients to use ARPA funds for surface transportation projects eligible for specific U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) programs, for projects not receiving USDOT funds, and to satisfy non-federal share requirements for certain surface transportation projects.
- **Title I projects**—This includes community development in line with the federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant program, subject to certain requirements and limitations.

For more specific guidance on the new allowable uses, review U.S. Treasury’s “Overview of the Interim Final Rule—August 2023” document, available on MTA’s “Federal COVID Relief” webpage on www.michigantownships.org (look under “Advocacy”; login is required). The previous existing ARPA fund eligible uses remain unchanged. All townships must obligate their ARPA funds by Dec. 31, 2024, and fully expend the funds by Dec. 31, 2026, now with the exception of surface transportation and Title I projects, which must be expended by Sept. 30, 2026.

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NEW FORM

New Form I-9 released, remote document verification expires

Starting Nov. 1, 2023, all employers, including townships, must use the new Form I-9, *Employment Eligibility Verification* for any new employees hired after this date. Employers can use the current Form I-9 (*edition date 10/21/19*) through Oct. 31, 2023.

All U.S. employers must complete and retain a Form I-9 for each individual hired for employment, including elected officials. On the form, the employer must verify the employment eligibility and identity documents presented by the employee and record the document information.

In addition, temporary flexibilities for employers to remotely verify Form I-9 documents, implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, expired July 31. If your township inspected I-9 verification documents remotely for employees hired between March 20, 2020, and July 31, you must have completed an in-person physical document inspection by Aug. 30, 2023. Eligible employers, enrolled in the federal E-Verify system in good standing, may use an alternative procedure to satisfy the document physical examination requirement. Visit www.uscis.gov/i-9 for more information.

MTA's lunchtime learning series, *Now You Know*, offers timely updates, insights from our experts and a chance to get your questions answered—all in just one hour! Don't miss our next episode coming: **Sept. 13 from noon to 1 p.m.**

The Art of the Agenda

While having an agenda is not required by law, it's one of the most important tools for creating successful meetings. After all, how can your township hold an effective meeting if nobody knows what's up for discussion until they get there? So, who's responsible for creating the agenda, what goes on it, how do items get added and when should it be distributed? Get these answers and more in just one hour! Join MTA's Member Information Services Director Mike Selden for insights into how you can use your agenda to direct the flow of your meetings.



Register at <https://bit.ly/NYKmta> for just \$25 per session! If your township subscribes to MTA Online at the Premium level, you get FREE access to **EVERY** session! For details, and to see a listing of past episodes available on demand, visit <https://learn.michigantownships.org/nyk>.



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MTA seeking input for 2024 legislative policy platform

MTA is committed to speaking on behalf of its members. This is evident in the development of our policy platform. We are seeking review and input from our members on the Association’s legislative policy platform, which guides MTA’s government relations efforts, and is reviewed and updated annually to reflect emerging issues and goals. MTA-member officials are encouraged to review MTA’s 2023 Policy Platform and share any proposed revisions and suggested additions by Nov. 27. The policy platform can be found on MTA’s website, www.michigantownships.org, under “Advocacy.”

Member-proposed policy changes will be reviewed by MTA legislative committees for word selection and legality, and to ensure they conform with the Association’s overall goals and objectives. The proposed policies will be presented at the 2024 MTA Annual Meeting, held in conjunction with our Annual Educational Conference & Expo in April.

Contact the MTA Government Relations Department at (517) 321-6467 or legislation@michigantownships.org with questions, comments or suggestions.

mta events september	
12	<i>Emerging Issues in Emergency Services</i> workshop, Frankenmuth
13	<i>Now You Know</i> lunchtime webinar: <i>The Art of the Agenda</i> <i>Can't make it? All Now You Know webinars are recorded and available for purchase to view at your convenience! Visit learn.michigantownships.org for details.</i>
26-27	Township Clerks' Professional Development Retreat, Harbor Springs

profile



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In addition, the firm provides municipal clients, without charge, a printed or electronic newsletter every other month on current matters involving local government law and cases. The articles contained in the newsletters are available at www.mikameyers.com. To sign up to receive these newsletters, visit <https://www.mikameyers.com/newsletter-sign-up/>.

Mika Meyers PLC is proud to support the continuing education of townships, their elected officials and the members of the Association through their involvement as an MTA Allied Service Provider. For more information, visit www.mikameyers.com.

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SEPTEMBER

14 Summer taxes due. (MCL 211.107)

Interest of 1% per month will accrue if the payment is late for the State Education Tax and county taxes that are part of the summer tax collection. (MCLs 211.905b(9) and 211.44a(6))

By 23 Clerks shall electronically transmit or mail (as requested) an absent voter ballot to each absent uniformed services or overseas voter who applied for an absent voter ballot 45 days or more before the Nov. 7 election. (MCL 168.759a; Mich Const. Art. 2, Sec. 4)

28 Absent voter ballots must be available for issuance to voters for the Nov. 7 election. (Mich. Const. Art. 2, Sec. 4)

through Oct. 17. Precinct inspectors appointed by local election commission for the Nov. 7 election. (MCL 168.674)

30 Township clerk delivers to supervisor and county clerk a certified copy of all statements, certificates, and records of votes directing monies to be raised by taxation of property. (MCL 211.36(1))

Financial officer of each township computes tax rates in accordance with MCLs 211.34d and 211.34 and governing body certifies that rates comply with Section 31, Article 9, of the 1963 Michigan Constitution and MCL 211.24e, Truth

in Taxation, on State Tax Commission (STC) Form L-4029 on or before Sept. 30. (MCL 211.36)

OCTOBER

By 9 Notice of days and hours for voter registration for the Nov. 7 election at clerk's office must be published in the newspaper. Notice may also be posted in at least two conspicuous places in each precinct. Notice must include offices and proposals that will be on the Nov. 7 ballot. (MCL 168.498)

Clerk shall post and enter into the Qualified Voter File (QVF) the hours the clerk's office will be open on Saturday or Sunday or both immediately before the Nov. 7 election to issue and receive absent voter ballots.

Clerks must also post and enter into the QVF any additional locations and hours that the clerk will be available to issue and receive absent voter ballots, if applicable. (MCL 168.761b)

16 Assessor reports the status of real and personal industrial facility tax property to the STC. (MCL 207.567(2))

Governmental units report to the STC on the status of each exemption granted under the Commercial Redevelopment Act. (MCL 207.666)

Qualified government units report to the STC on the status of each exemption granted under the Commercial Rehabilitation Act (MCL 207.854) and Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act. (MCL 125.2794)

Deadline for assessor's annual report of the determination made under MCL 207.783(1) to each taxing unit that levies taxes upon property in the local unit in which a new facility or rehabilitated facility is located and to each holder of the Neighborhood Enterprise Zone certificate. (MCL 207.783(2))

17 Deadline for precinct inspectors for the Nov. 7 election to be appointed by local election commission. (MCL 168.674)

20 Deadline for payment to municipalities from the Local Community Stabilization Authority. Local Community Stabilization Share revenue for county-allocated millage and other millages not levied 100% in December. (MCL 123.1357(8)(a) and (c))

23 Last day to register by mail or online and be eligible to vote in the Nov. 7 election. (MCL 168.497)

24 *through 8 p.m. on Nov. 7.* In-person registration for the Nov. 7 election with local clerk with proof of residency. (MCL 168.497)

25 Last day for candidates not appearing on the Nov. 7 ballot to file annual campaign finance statement by 5 p.m. (MCL 169.233)

Last day for candidates not appearing on the Nov. 7 ballot to submit quarterly campaign finance statement by 5 p.m. (MCL 169.233)

27 Write-in candidates for the Nov. 7 election file Declaration of Intent forms by 4 p.m. (MCL 168.737a)

Last day for candidates or ballot questions appearing on the Nov. 7 ballot to submit pre-election campaign finance statement by 5 p.m. (MCL 169.233)

31 Deadline for submission of New Personal Property PA 328 of 1998, Obsolete Property PA 146 of 2000, Commercial Rehabilitation PA 210 of 2005, Neighborhood Enterprise Zone PA 147 of 1992, Charitable Nonprofit Housing PA 612 of 2006, Commercial Facilities PA 255 of 1978 and Industrial Facilities PA 198 of 1974 tax exemption applications to the STC. Note: Applications for the above exemption programs received after Oct. 1 shall be considered by the commission contingent upon staff availability.

Notice of the Nov. 7 election published. One notice required. (MCL 168.788R)



How do we account for property tax collections?

Efficient and accurate accounting procedures are vital for township officials responsible for collecting and managing property tax payments. This article delves into the accounting processes behind property tax collections, shedding light on the revenue and liability accounts involved. Understanding these procedures ensures transparency, compliance and effective financial management in townships.

General fund accounts

Property tax payments represent a significant revenue source for townships. When recording property tax collections, funds should be allocated to various revenue accounts based on their designated purposes. Common revenue accounts associated with property tax payments can include:

- **General operating account:** This is the primary revenue account for property tax collections, representing the funds used to support the township’s overall operations and services in accordance with the voter-approved operating millage.
- **Administration fees:** Townships may add up to a 1% property tax administration fee to cover the related expenses for preparing, mailing, collecting and accounting for property tax revenue. It is important to account for these administration fees separately from the other millage or special assessment revenues.
- **Special revenue accounts:** In some cases, specific property tax levies are earmarked for particular purposes, such as road maintenance, parks and recreation, libraries, or public safety. Each designated purpose may have a separate special revenue account. Also, some townships establish separate special revenue funds for maintaining the unused balances of these restricted tax collections from year to year.
- **Special assessment accounts:** Depending on local regulations, townships may have additional revenue accounts to address specific community needs, such as drains, garbage, streetlights or township debts.

When a property tax payment is received and properly receipted, the treasurer would make a journal entry to debit the bank account that the payment has been deposited into and make an equal credit to the appropriate revenue accounts. Typically, advanced accounting software, such as BS&A, is doing this accounting work behind the scenes. It is crucial to accurately allocate property tax payments to the appropriate revenue accounts to ensure financial transparency and facilitate budget planning.

Tax fund accounts

Townships also must remit a portion of property tax revenues to other entities, such as school districts, counties, special districts, or other funds within the township. These receipts are recorded as liabilities (or credits) until the funds are transferred. At the time of disbursement, these accounts are debited and the bank account would show a corresponding credit. Common liability accounts associated with property tax payments include:

- **School district tax account:** As mandated by state regulations, a portion of property tax revenues collected by townships can be allocated to local school districts. This account represents the liability owed to the school district until the funds are disbursed. In order to recuperate some of the administration costs, townships typically may collect an administration fee of up to \$2.50 per parcel within that school district. The fee is usually withheld from the first summer distribution to said school district.
- **County tax account:** In most jurisdictions, a portion of property tax revenues is allocated to the local county government to support various services and operations. The county tax account serves as a liability account until the funds are remitted to the county treasurer.
- **Special districts account:** If there are special districts within the township, such as water or sanitation districts, a portion of property tax revenues may be allocated to these districts. The special districts account functions as a liability account until the funds are remitted to the respective entities.

Navigating the accounting procedures for property tax payments is essential for township treasurers. Should township officials have any specific questions or require further guidance, it is recommended to consult their auditors or CPAs, who can provide expert assistance tailored to their township’s unique circumstances.

Information provided in *Financial Forum* should not be considered legal advice, and readers are encouraged to contact their township auditor and/or attorney for advice specific to their situation.





We have boxes full of files and paperwork taking up space in our hall. Can we dispose of them, or do we have to keep them?

The answer depends on the type of document and whether there is an official record retention period that tells you when the document may be destroyed.

Public records of a township are also the property of the state and can be disposed of or destroyed only in compliance with Michigan law. MCL 399.5 provides that “a record that is required to be kept by a public officer in the discharge of duties imposed by law, that is required to be filed in a public office, or that is a memorial or a transaction of a public officer made in the discharge of a duty, is the property of this state and shall not be disposed of, mutilated or destroyed, except as provided by law.”

In other words, you cannot dispose of any township record unless a law or the office of Records Management Services in the Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget says you can.

In practice, the state has simplified the process by adopting “general schedules,” or lists, of common records types that identify when those records may be disposed of or destroyed. Although a township could create its own “special” record retention schedule, it would have to obtain state approval to use it. A township does not need to take any action to adopt or get approval before using a general record retention schedule.

The General Schedule No. 10—Michigan Township Record Retention, approved July 1, 1997, by the State Archives and State Administrative Board, was the original official record retention schedule for township records not covered by another schedule. In recent years, the state, working with MTA and other governmental agencies, has updated and reorganized most of the general record retention schedules. Township records are currently covered by several schedules, including, but not limited to, General Schedules No. 10—Townships, No. 11—Local Law Enforcement, No. 17—Public Libraries, No. 18—Fire/Ambulance Departments, No. 23—Elections Records, No. 25—Township Clerks, No. 26—Local Government Human Resources, No. 29—Township Treasurers, and No. 35—Local Government Administrative Records. In all, there are at least 37 schedules for local governments. Townships can access current record retention schedules and other records management resources on www.michigantownships.org (access our “Records Management” webpage via the “Answer Center” under the “Member” tab; login is required), or on the State of Michigan’s website at www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement (click on “Retention and Disposal Schedules”).

Although they are called “retention” schedules, the schedules actually identify the earliest time that a record may be destroyed. If a record is not listed on the schedule, it cannot be disposed of or destroyed and must be retained permanently, unless permission is obtained from the State Archives and State Administrative Board. Some records are listed on the schedule as having a permanent retention period, as a reminder to keep them permanently and not destroy them.

Where a law requires a retention period, it is cited in the schedule. But it’s not always a specific statute that establishes the retention period. For example, many records should be retained for a period in which the township or individuals connected to the records may have some legal liability.

Some documents are defined as “non-record” materials, and do not need to be retained for a specific period. General Schedule No. 1—Non-Record Materials describes types of non-record materials such as duplicates or copies of records, outdated publications, preliminary drafts or notes that do not represent significant basic steps in the preparation of public records.

The township clerk has custody of all the records, books and papers of the township when no other provision is made by law for custody by another official. And the clerk is responsible for “the safekeeping of the records, books and papers of the township in the manner required by law,” including seeing that they are not kept where they will be exposed to an “unusual hazard of fire or theft.”

In addition, a township should comply with the retention schedules to help ensure compliance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and other statutes that require public access to records.

So it is important for the clerk and any township officials with recordkeeping responsibility to be aware of the retention periods, and for the entire township board to support and appropriately fund recordkeeping methods that protect the



safety of the records, but also to organize and maintain them in a system, location and format that allows for easy and timely access to keep them readily available to the public upon request for copies or to inspect, as long as the records exist.



How long do you retain email or text messages?

The format of the record makes no difference. As long as it is a “writing,” it may be a record subject to a retention schedule—and to the FOIA and other requests for public access.

A “writing” is defined by the FOIA as: “handwriting, typewriting, printing, photostating, photographing, photocopying, and every other means of recording, and includes letters, words, pictures, sounds, or symbols, or combinations thereof, and papers, maps, magnetic or paper tapes, photographic films or prints, microfilm, microfiche, magnetic or punched cards, discs, drums, or other means of recording or retaining meaningful content.” (MCL 15.232)

It’s the message, not the medium, that determines the nature of the record and its retention period. Imagine the email or text correspondence printed out. Or, if it’s easier, actually print it out. That takes away the distraction of the digital format in determining if something is a public record and what type of record it is. It’s the same for a taped or digital recording. Imagine it transcribed onto paper.

The record retention schedules include brief descriptions that can help in identifying the type of record. Once you’ve determined what the record is, then refer to the record retention period code in the schedule. You retain that record for the same period as if it were a paper record.



Can we make digital copies of our paper records and throw out the paper ones?

You may make digital copies, but you cannot destroy the original, paper versions until one of the general record retention schedules allows disposal.

Under the Records Reproduction Act, Public Act 116 of 1992, MCL 24.401, *et seq.* (formerly the Records Media Act), a township or a township official acting in his or her official capacity may reproduce a record by photograph, photocopy, microreproduction, optical media, data transfer, digitization, digital migration, digital imaging, magnetic media, printing, or any other reproduction method approved by Records Management Services in the Department of Technology, Management and Budget.

A **certified**, non-paper copy of a record made under the act has “the same force and effect as a true paper copy of a record.” A township may scan paper originals to make digital

copies of records, such as PDF copies. If certified, the copy is admissible in court, administrative proceedings and elsewhere as evidence in the same manner as an original.

When the act was amended in 2005 to allow this, there was some confusion as to whether a township could scan all of its paper original records into digital formats and then dispose of the paper originals to “go paperless.” But township original records can be disposed of or destroyed only in compliance with a state-approved record retention schedule, and some records, such as minutes, have a permanent retention period.

Also, the officer in whose office the original was filed or recorded **must certify a copy produced under the act as a true copy** for it to have the same force and effect as the original for all legal purposes.

So, township records may be digitized to allow for more efficient storage and retrieval, but the original paper records must be retained unless, and until, a retention schedule authorizes their destruction.

Hello, MTA ... ? provides general information on typical questions asked by township officials. Readers are encouraged to contact an attorney when specific legal guidance is needed. Member township officials and personnel may contact MTA Member Information Services with questions or requests from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., weekdays, at (517) 321-6467 (press 1) or fax (517) 321-8908.

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Michigan communities have a 22-person planning department. You can, too.

“They’re always available to provide advice on most planning or zoning issues and their advice is based on 35 years of experience in numerous communities throughout Michigan.”

R. Brent Savidant, planning director, City of Troy

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A look ahead to the fall legislative session

The Michigan Legislature returns to their full session schedule following Labor Day, and while no formal agenda has been released, the fall session is expected to address a comprehensive list of issues—many of which will impact township government and your board's ability to govern. Gov. Whitmer will have delivered her “What's Next” agenda on Aug. 30 outlining her policy priorities for the fall. Thus, September and October are expected to be a “fast and furious” few months on the legislative front, and members are asked to stay informed via MTA communications and to engage on issues shared in our updates and action alerts.

Revenue/tax. MTA and other local government organizations will be working to advance legislation that will benefit local units of government, including enacting a reimbursement mechanism for both the increase in the personal property tax (PPT) exemption (effective with 2023 tax year) from \$80,000 to \$180,000 and the lost revenue moving forward for the disabled veterans property tax exemption. The PPT bills, Senate Bill 331 and House Bills 4553 and 4554, would provide reimbursement to local units for the revenue lost due to the increase in the exemption beginning with the 2024 tax year; for the 2023 tax year, a \$75 million appropriation is in place to hold local units harmless. There are also now three sets of bills pending to provide local reimbursement for the disabled veterans property tax exemption. SBs 95 and 96, and 454 and 455 are pending in the Senate, and HBs 4894 and 4895 are pending in the House.

Revenue sharing trust fund. MTA is also working to advance legislation—HBs 4274 and 4275 and SBs 182 and 183—that would create a revenue sharing trust fund to 1) protect and preserve statutory revenue sharing and 2) bring in all local units (1,091 townships) that previously received statutory revenue sharing but saw their funding eliminated during the state's recession. Finally, but not least, is advancing legislation to address the big box store challenge locals have faced for over a decade.

Preserving local authority. This remains a high priority for the fall session. In addition to the continuing fight to retain local government's voice in the placement and operation of sand and gravel mines (opposition to HBs 4526-4528), several bills will be introduced that will eliminate all local authority on the placement (siting) of renewable energy (solar and wind) facilities of a specified capacity. The two issues—preemption of local authority on sand and gravel mines AND for renewable energy facilities—may be tied together to obtain votes for passage in the House. Again, please watch for updates and MTA Action Alerts on these two issues.

Elections. Even after the recent enactment of Proposal 2022-2 implementation legislation, there are several election changes that will impact townships and other local governments. Due

to the constitutional requirements of Proposal 2022-2, there is a push to lengthen the current certification period following an election. Depending on the timeframe, this change will impact several issues for township officials and other local governments: the date elected officials take the oath of office as well as the levy of any recently approved millage or bond proposals on summer and winter tax bills. Discussion also continues on moving the August primary election to an earlier date to allow clerks more time between the primary and general elections. The date agreed upon could impact summer tax bills and whether recently approved millage proposals could be included. And finally, legislation was introduced in late June to create a state Voting Rights Act—SBs 401-404; these bills are also likely to see action in the coming months.

Other issues MTA expects to see movement and possible passage on include legislation to create a statewide septic code (HBs 4479 and 4480), changes to the Drain Code (HBs 4382 and 4383), restoring polluter pay provisions (not yet introduced), several changes to the state's energy code (a rewrite of the state's energy code; SBs 271-277 and HBs 4759-4761), modernization and changes to the Open Meetings Act (HB 4693) and updates/changes regarding mobile home parks.

The next two months will be very active legislatively, as these are only some of the items expected to be considered. It is critically important that you engage with your legislators on the impact these proposals will have on your community. MTA will provide updates on these and other issues, but please reach out with questions on any pending legislation. Together, we can make a difference!

Legislative lowdown

A quick look at critical bills that MTA is following as they move through the legislative process. Watch our weekly *Township Insights* e-newsletter, sent to all MTA member officials each Friday, for updates.

SB 10 & HB 4036: Public utilities—Prohibits local units of government from imposing a ban on the use of natural gas or installation of natural gas infrastructure. *MTA opposes.*

SB 17: Fireworks—Modifies the days that fireworks use may be regulated by a local unit of government and increases penalties for certain violations. *MTA supports.*

SB 40: Unemployment—Increases maximum number of unemployment benefit weeks. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 41: Construction—Prohibits local units from enacting an ordinance prohibiting use of energy-efficient appliances in new or existing residential buildings. *MTA opposes.*

SB 47: Farmland—Allows relinquishment of portion of farmland from agreement or easement to make boundaries more regular. *MTA neutral.*

SB 55: Property tax—Provides retroactive application of poverty exemption. *MTA supports.*

SBs 95-96, 454-455 & HBs 4894-4895: Disabled veterans property tax reimbursement—Provides a mechanism for the state to reimburse local units of government for the property tax exemption available to veterans classified as 100% disabled and their surviving spouses. *MTA supports.*

SB 150: Michigan Tax Tribunal—Expands methods for tax tribunal to hold small claims hearings to include telephonically or by videoconferencing. *MTA supports.*

SB 155: Voting equipment—Prohibits use of electronic voting systems that contain certain parts or equipment. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 169: Collective bargaining—Requires public employers to provide public employee contact information to bargaining representatives. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 171 & HB 4231: Local government—Repeals the Fair and Open Competition in Governmental Construction Act. *MTA supports.*

SBs 176, 330 & 364 and HB 4896: Disabled veterans property tax exemption—Allows one-time filing for exemption and an unremarried surviving spouse to retain exemption. *MTA monitoring.*

SBs 182-183 & HBs 4274-4275: Revenue sharing trust fund—Establishes a “Revenue Sharing Trust Fund” and dedicates portion of general sales tax revenue to the fund to distribute to townships, cities, villages and counties. *MTA supports.*

SB 244: Workers’ compensation—Extends presumption of causation of heart and respiratory diseases to certain members of police, fire and public safety departments. *MTA opposes.*

SB 277: Solar operations—Allows policy for farmers to rent land for commercial solar operations while enrolled in the PA 116 program. *MTA monitoring.*

SB 293: Housing—Modifies and expands the housing and community development fund to make financing available to middle-income households. *MTA supports.*

SBs 401-404: Elections—Creates state voting rights act. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4012: Speed limits—Modifies procedure for establishing speed limits. *MTA supports.*

HB 4023: Underground storage tanks—Revises placement distance of underground storages tanks from a public water supply. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4033: Elections—Requires state to reimburse costs for certain special elections. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4129-4130: Elections—Prohibits intimidating an election inspector or preventing an election inspector from performing his or her duties. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4185-4190: Asbestos abatement—Modifies and creates new acts relating to the regulation of asbestos handling and removal activities and how public entities may enter into contracts and agreements with contractors engaging in those activities. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4207-4208: Broadband equipment—Exempts eligible broadband equipment from personal property taxes. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4210: Elections—Provides for the electronic return of absent voter ballots by military voters and their spouses. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4230: Labor—Removes prohibition against deduction from a public employee’s wages for certain political purpose. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4321: Environmental protections—Provides criminal penalties and civil fines for unlawful dumping of garbage. *MTA supports.*

HB 4360: Local government—Allows emergency services authorities to serve partial municipalities. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4382-4383: Drain Code—Revises Chapter 22 of Drain Code process through determination sufficiency of petition and proposed boundaries. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4428: Public notices—Revises publication of legal notices and creates the Local Government Public Notice Act. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4479-4480: Statewide septic code—Provides for the assessment and regulations of on-site wastewater treatment systems. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4486: Governmental immunity—Eliminates governmental immunity and allows governmental agency and

employee liability for criminal sexual conduct. *MTA opposes.*

HBs 4502-4503: Election challengers—Provides requirements and training requirements for election challengers. *MTA supports.*

HBs 4526-4528: Local preemption—Preempts local authority for regulations for sand and gravel mining operations. *MTA opposes.*

HB 4548: Notaries public—Provides fee for remote notarization. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 4553-4554 & SB 331: Local government reimbursement—Creates local government reimbursement fund, provides for distribution of money to the fund to reimburse local governments for revenue lost due to the increase in the small taxpayer exemption. *MTA supports.*

HB 4566: Vehicle registration—Allocates revenue from vehicle registration fees to county where registrant resides and distributes per lane mile to local road agency. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4567: Elections—Removes certain references to challenged ballots. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4568: Elections—Eliminates prohibition on hiring transportation assistance to the polls. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4569: Voter registration—Provides preregistration to vote at age 16. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4570: Absent voter ballots—Provides online application for absent voter ballots. *MTA monitoring.*

HB 4572: Property tax assessments—Exempts transfer of ownership of certain real property to certain individuals from uncapping of taxable value upon transfer. *MTA monitoring.*

HBs 4605-4606: Public safety—Creates the public safety and violence prevention fund and provides for the earmark and distribution of 1.5% of the 4% of sales tax revenue into the fund for disbursement. *MTA supports.*

HB 4693: Open Meetings Act—Allows nonelected and noncompensated public bodies to meet remotely. *MTA monitoring.*

The great outdoors

Outdoor recreation fosters township quality of life, economic development

A 6 o'clock sun shines through the trees and onto a gently flowing Duck Creek as **Terrie Hampel**, co-chair of Friends of Fruitland Township Trails, investigates remnants of a logging bridge and discusses plans for the Duck Creek Natural Area.

For the last decade, Hampel has worked with local residents and volunteers to form the Friends group and develop non-motorized trails on the township-owned property. The 300 acres of undeveloped wooded terrain has old two tracks and a new parking area to improve public access. Future plans include American with Disabilities Act (ADA)-accessible trails, more signage, a second parking area and new bridges over the creeks.

Former **Fruitland Township** (Muskegon Co.) Supervisor **Dick Hain Sr.** helped acquire the property some 50 years ago. He saw it as a valuable parcel that should be preserved for public use. Clear-cut during the logging era, the land is important to the local watershed with the confluence of two spring-fed creeks that flow into Lake Michigan.

"He foresaw the day when natural areas like this would become scarce, and often remarked, 'You can't grow more land,'" said Hampel, who also served eight years as a Fruitland Township trustee. "Today, we have the unique opportunity to bring Supervisor Hain's vision full circle."

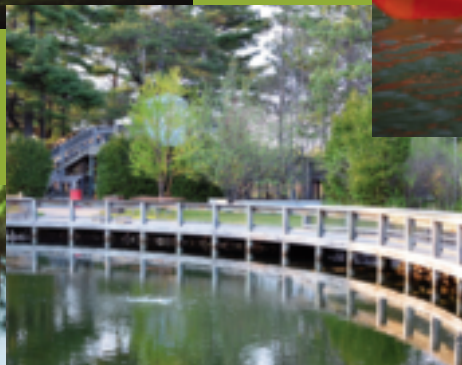
Across the state, townships are tackling recreational projects large and small in an effort to improve quality of life

for local residents, spur economic development and drive tourism dollars into rural communities. Oftentimes, these grassroots efforts take a village of volunteers, the support of local donors and larger state dollars, and years to see them come to fruition.

Outdoor recreation improves health, tourism

Michigan is a state that spends millions to promote its natural resources and thrives on outdoor recreation. It's woven into the state's way of life. Michiganders love heading "up north," often to rural townships and beachside communities, to enjoy seasonal cottages, kayaking, fishing and hunting. People took to the outdoors in record numbers during the pandemic, along with buying boats, recreation vehicles and off-road vehicles.

Michigan's eco-tourism and outdoor recreation economy grew by 15.4% in 2021, contributing \$10.8 billion and 109,595 jobs to the state's economy and \$4.7 billion in wages, according to Michigan Economic Development Corporation. That's not counting local outdoor apparel and equipment retailers, which added another \$2.7 billion to the economy.



Photos courtesy of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources

In late 2022, the state moved its Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources into the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. The state has a growing sector of businesses that design, test and manufacture outdoor gear and equipment. Companies look to locate in communities that support the industry. Marquette, a hub for outdoor recreation in the Upper Peninsula, established Innovate Marquette, a business incubator to support outdoor start-up companies.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and lawmakers also made a bipartisan show of support for Michigan’s outdoors as an important economic driver. In a post-COVID world, expanding access to trails and recreation areas became a no-brainer. An influx of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding has spurred a historic investment in parks and recreation. The Building Michigan Together Plan, signed into law in March 2022, included \$250 million for state park facilities, \$115 million for urban recreational greenways, and \$65 million for local parks through the Michigan Spark Grants Program.

What does all of this mean for townships and how can they leverage more grant funding and local support to tackle recreation projects? Besides improved health outcomes, access to recreational amenities improves overall quality

of life. Investments in parks, bicycle trails, natural areas and water resources attract new residents and build strong communities. They create a sense of place, encourage citizenship and promote environmental stewardship.

“Enjoyment of nature and history in natural settings is interesting and more fun—think of that cool dip in a lake at the end of your hike in August, or a paddle down the river to calm Lake Michigan,” Hampel said. “A township’s reputation can be built around good sense, beauty, fun, learning and safety for all ages.”

A ‘lifeline to Michigan communities’

A decade ago, the concept of “Trail Towns” became a popular way to revitalize local communities and maximize trail-based tourism. The 22-mile Betsie Valley Trail, which traverses several townships between Frankfort and Thompsonville in Benzie County, is one such example among many. It is owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, operated by Benzie County and supported by the nonprofit group Friends of the Betsie Valley Trail—an example that working with multiple partners is essential to getting things done. In addition, Benzie County officials are exploring ways to support a director’s position to lead the county’s parks and recreation management.

State Outdoor Recreation Plan shares insights, examines trends and helps guide policy

Michigan's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) offers a wealth of insights into emerging outdoor recreation trends and issues. State and local recreation partners use SCORP to guide policy decisions and investments in outdoor recreation.

The five-year strategic plan is based on the results of the 2021 Michigan Outdoor Recreation Survey. The top five outdoor recreation activities for the 2023-2027 SCORP included: sightseeing and/or scenic driving for pleasure, visiting parks or playgrounds, visiting the beach but not swimming, going for a walk on local unpaved trails or paths, and going for a walk on local streets or sidewalks.

Some key survey takeaways include:

- Most Michigan residents had participated in some type of outdoor recreation activity within the past year. Michigan's overall outdoor recreation participation rate is 95%. Eighty-six percent of Michiganders are involved in trail activities and "other" outdoor activities. Water activities logged 80% participation, wildlife activities 52% and snow activities 40%.
- Michiganders, overall, report that participating in outdoor recreation allows them to be close to nature, enjoy psychological benefits and break from their typical routines.
- Physical health is a primary motivator to engage in recreational activity. However, nearly half of Michigan residents do not engage in the recommended amount of regular physical activity. Promoting outdoor recreation is an easy way to increase and encourage overall health among all Michigan residents.
- Based on the outdoor recreation estimator tool model, the total annual health cost of illness savings in Michigan due to the health impact of outdoor recreation was estimated at \$2.8 billion.
- Michiganders were satisfied with the quality of outdoor recreation within a 10-minute walk (71%), within a 30-minute drive (81%) and more than a 30-minute drive away (83%).

"Outdoor recreation is the lifeline to Michigan communities," said Tina Nowakowski, director of Communication and Strategic Partnerships at the Michigan Recreation and Park Association (mParks). "Trail systems connect municipalities to one another and help bring visitors to new places."

Townships from the Keweenaw to Leelanau Peninsulas to the Sunrise Side and metro Detroit continue to invest in trails, parks and other public lands to promote tourism and improve recreational opportunities for local residents. It's also a way for local municipalities to attract businesses and year-round residents to more rural regions. "It's important for townships to invest in outdoor recreation because these amenities are vital to supporting communities," Nowakowski said. "Access to parks and trails increases home values and opportunities for community programs and events."

Expanding trails and recreational offerings support local businesses and economies as well. Kayak and canoe liveries, locally owned resorts and outdoor outfitters also saw a boom in business since 2020. People took up new outdoor hobbies and needed the gear to support it.

"Business owners strive to be in locations near kayak launches, beaches and public parks, knowing these places draw people who can ultimately turn into customers," Nowakowski said.

Thanks to ARPA funding at the state and local levels, communities have extra money to invest in infrastructure and park improvements. **Redford Charter Township** (Wayne Co.), for example, is getting a new \$19.5 million state-of-the-art recreation and wellness center with ARPA dollars from both the township and county's portions of the federal allocation, as well as other federal funds.

Townships also are eligible to apply for Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grants to acquire property or make park improvements. These competitive grants require a local match, which can be one hurdle for townships that lack resources. Trust fund grants can be used for land acquisition and the development and expansion of parks, trail networks, public beaches, forests and wetlands. They also fund park and facility upgrades and accessibility to ensure equal access for all.

"Funding is always the biggest hurdle to completing new park projects," Nowakowski said. "It's important that townships utilize the many resources available to them to be successful."

State funding through the Trust Fund, Recreation Passport and Spark programs are the main state resources, Nowakowski said. Townships must leverage partnerships with community, philanthropic and health foundations and other private funding sources, and work together with municipalities and regional trail groups. Here are three township success stories and how they are getting it done.



Calumet Charter Township develops a recreation area for all seasons

In the heart of the Keweenaw Peninsula, **Calumet Charter Township** (Houghton Co.) works with local partners to maintain and support several recreational facilities. The Swedetown Recreation Area features 1,900 acres of rolling wooded land that has grown into a four-season recreation area.

The township started acquiring the land over decades, after several industries moved out, and owns it in partnership with North Houghton County Water and Sewer Authority. Township officials also applied for grants through the Trust Fund program to purchase more land and began developing the cross-country ski trails in the mid-1980s.

“We knew cross-country skiing was becoming popular and the township saw something there and sought out the grants,” said Supervisor **Tim Gasperich**.

Mountain biking is another popular activity in the Upper Peninsula, and Swedetown Recreation Area has transformed into a year-round destination for all ages and activities. Local sponsors, donors and clubs help support and maintain the township’s recreational facilities.

The Swedetown Trails Club develops and maintains the groomed cross-country ski trails and now mountain biking trails. The chalet is a warming hut for the trails and the adjacent lighted sledding hill and fat-tire bike trails in the winter.

“We definitely need partners,” Gasperich said. “We don’t have a huge budget to work with as far as investing in and buying property. It’s hard for us to maintain and build trails. We need to partner financially and labor wise; otherwise, we would never be able to handle everything.”

During the warmer months, the multi-use trail system offers 25 miles of single-track mountain bike trails with maps and trail markers. The trails are also open for nature hikes, dog walking and trail running.

The Swedetown trails are popular with both locals and visitors, and are host to the Great Bear Chase, a cross-country ski race and skiathlon, and the Great Deer Chase Mountain Bike Race now in its 18th year.

“We advertise outside of the area and Swedetown Trails has a great website,” Gasperich said. “A lot of people like to cross-country ski, just like snowmobiling. Our Swedetown area is a great area. People come from all over to use it.”

Waterworks Park, on the shores of Lake Superior, provides public access to the lake as well as picnic pavilions, playground, volleyball court and an ADA-accessible ramp to access the beach. At Lions Club Park, a disc golf course, barrier-free walking trail and kayak launch access make it popular with locals.

“We’re looking to put another disc golf course down at Waterworks Park,” Gasperich said. “Disc golf is very popular, and all of these things bring people into the area.”

The township is also home to Queen Anne’s Falls, Keweenaw National Historic Park and an indoor shooting range. The township supports two indoor ice arenas, the Calumet Colosseum and the George Gipp Arena.

The Copper Country Curling Club helps locals pass the time during the winter. The historic Calumet Drill Shop was converted into the club’s home through a collaboration between Calumet Charter Township, the curling club and the Keweenaw National Historical Park.

Gasperich said the recreation area and other facilities are good for winter and summer tourism, but it also benefits local residents by giving them something to do during the long winter months.

“The winter can get very long and very dark, so it’s really nice to get out and do some skiing,” he said. “A lot of people find it healthy to exercise. And we have a few local corporations that use our recreation to draw in employees as something to offer.”

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Photos of the Breezeway
by Thomas P. Mann.

Banks Township celebrates 15 years of 'the Breezeway'

Back in 2008, local elected officials, community leaders and business owners in Antrim and Charlevoix Counties spearheaded an effort to market and brand the rural road C-48 as “the Breezeway.” The goal was twofold: boost tourism and gain support for a road repaving project. The 28-mile route runs between U.S. 31 and U.S. 131 in northern Michigan, starting in **Banks Township** (Antrim Co.), with its communities of Atwood and Ellsworth, through East Jordan, and ending in the village of Boyne Falls, located in **Boyer Valley Township** (Charlevoix Co.).

The Breezeway isn't a trail in the traditional sense, although it does provide access to recreational opportunities like hiking, biking and kayaking. It's also a popular road bicycle and motorcycle route. The rural road features scenic overlooks, working farms and wineries, museums and art galleries, and shopping and dining destinations.

Donna Heeres, Banks Township (Antrim Co.) clerk, was involved from the start and said the grassroots effort grew out of necessity. C-48, a main thoroughfare for locals but often overlooked by tourists, was in desperate need of repairs. “If that got shut down, it was really going to be a hardship,” Heeres said. “We got together to see how we could get some funding and get that road improved.”

Banks Township and Antrim County led the charge, repaving its section first, but eventually they got Charlevoix County on board and the entire road was repaired. The committee of volunteers also wanted to lure travelers off both highways and into their rural Breezeway communities.

Together, they hatched a plan and joined efforts in the spirit of collaboration and economic development. The region was struggling after the recession, and they wanted to make the Breezeway a vacation destination.

Heeres learned of a grant opportunity through the state's Center for Regional Excellence. The group applied and received a \$25,000 grant to continue to expand and grow the volunteer marketing efforts of the Breezeway Task Force.

“We took that and we developed a plan for promoting our area to get people to travel this road in the fall,” Heeres said. “We have spectacular color up here. Google Maps didn't have us on the map as a route and we needed to change that. So, that's what we started doing little by little.”

The Breezeway is a great example of what can be accomplished when local officials, residents, business owners and others come together for a common goal, said Mary Faculak, CEO/president of East Jordan Area Chamber of Commerce. “We are celebrating 15 years of successfully working together and this just continues to grow with enthusiasm,” Faculak said. “We dare to be different. We're not afraid to try.”

The Breezeway garage sales held over Memorial Day weekend have become very popular over the years, Faculak said. “It's helping our residents along the Breezeway,” she added. “There is a great sense of pride among people who live along the Breezeway, and this has helped a lot of families go on summer vacations.”

The Breezeway marketing effort also spawned organized car and motorcycle cruises, local festivals and fall color tours. Visitors from across the state come to leaf peep and pick up their goodie bags with prizes and coupons for area businesses. The chair lift rides and new SkyBridge at Boyne Mountain Resort are another popular attraction on the tour.

“People really love the down-home feel of our area,” said Heeres, who has served as the township's clerk for 40 years. “We've done a lot of different things, but this is one of our shining stars. This one impacts the whole area.”

Faculak also served on the original task force and still promotes the Breezeway on behalf of the East Jordan Area Chamber of Commerce, which represents the Breezeway communities. “Once they get into these communities, they realize all of these opportunities and unique experiences,” Faculak said, noting the area is ripe for entrepreneurs.

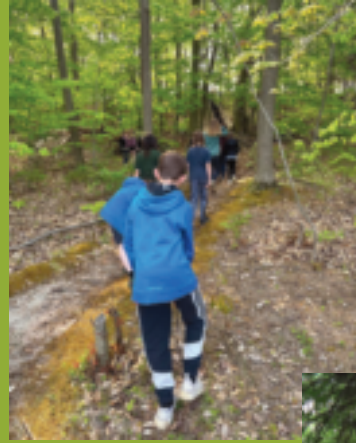
Besides the Breezeway, Banks Township is close to several parks, including Antrim Creek Natural Area and Barnes Park Campground and St. Clair Lake-Six Mile Lake Natural

Area. The area is at the north end of the chain of lakes, which includes Ellsworth Lake, and the communities of Atwood and Ellsworth.

Many people discover the region through camping, kayaking and boating, Heeres said. The township is in the middle of bicycle trails out of Traverse City and Petoskey that regional officials have plans to connect. The nonprofit organization Paddle Antrim promotes kayaking on the Chain of Lakes Water Trail and hosts the Paddle Antrim Festival in September.

The 156-acre Antrim Creek Natural Area on Lake Michigan used to be privately owned land. A portion was donated to the township, which officials deeded to the county to use as a local match for a Trust Fund grant to acquire more land for the natural area. The township also has a small park a mile north with picnic tables, bike racks and beach access. “That whole stretch of Lake Michigan is prime for Petoskey stones and people come from all over to walk that,” Heeres said.

Banks Township has 1,800 full-time residents, and many struggle with poverty, homelessness and basic needs. Anything to improve the tax base and offerings for residents is welcome. “The collaboration has been the key on all of these projects, working with your neighbors to better each other,” Heeres said. “It’s not just pulling in the tourists in our community; it’s pulling them into our area. If we can work together and promote each other, we feel that is the key.”



Fruitland Township's Duck Creek Natural Area gains momentum

In West Michigan, Fruitland Township borders Lake Michigan and includes Duck Lake State Park and much of White Lake. The semi-rural township has been a popular vacation destination for more than a century, with quaint cottages lining White Lake and a mix of seasonal and year-round residents.

The Duck Creek Natural Area (DCNA) is in the center of the township, and volunteers have been hard at work to develop trails and expand public access. In April, the township in partnership with Friends of Fruitland Township Trails (FFTT) submitted a Trust Fund grant application that would give the DCNA a big boost.

Plans call for handicap-accessible trails in the southern section and bridges over Duck Creek that would connect the two portions of the natural area. They also want to create a second parking lot and access point that is north of Duck Creek.

Building trails and promoting Fruitland Township's parks and recreation has been a labor of love for Hampel, whose family has strong ties to the area. She focuses on promotion and fundraising alongside Friends co-chair and chief trail builder **Dave Rice**.

“After about five years of serious fundraising efforts, we have made significant progress in securing funding for three phases of development in the DCNA, including bridges across the creek there, making trails safe and ADA compliant, and installing benches, parking lots and signage for users,” Hampel said. “The process continues and as many people have told us, building and using trails can be a long and arduous process.”

The southern trails are signed and marked, and volunteers recently built a kiosk at the Duck Lake Road entrance. Rice continues to map out and mark trails in the northern section and work with Michigan Department of Environment, Great



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Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) on permits to build bridges over the creek. They've had Boy Scouts build several benches, and smaller Rotary and community foundation grants paid for the new kiosk and trail improvements. Hampel would eventually like to add interpretative signs that detail the history of the Native Americans in the area.

About a decade ago, a group of trail users, residents, community activists and elected officials began meeting informally to discuss the idea of more multi-use trails in the township. Hampel has been involved with the Duck Creek Natural Area since those early meetings, spurred on by former Supervisor Dick Hain's desire to see the land turned into some type of natural area. "Our surveys and many conversations with locals and township visitors have shown us that health, fitness and outdoor recreation are goals and needs for everyone," Hampel said. "Providing places nearby for those to grow and thrive is FFTT's goal."

The nonprofit Friends group also collaborates with other trail groups, such as Friends of the Berry Junction Trail, Muskegon Bike Collation, West Michigan Trails & Greenway Coalition, the county road commission and Fruitland Township to work on road bike trails and ways to connect existing trails.

Scenic Drive runs along the lakeshore and connects the communities of Whitehall-Montague to the north with Muskegon State Park and North Muskegon to the south. Other nearby attractions include Muskegon Luge and Adventure Park, Michigan's Adventure, Hart-Montague Bike Trail, Anderson Woods Nature Preserve, White River Light Station and White Lake Channel to Lake Michigan.

Hampel's long-range vision is a cross-township trail system that connects the Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail to Lake Michigan. "A 10-mile stretch of Scenic Drive that will connect two state parks is also part of the Regional Trail Plan, which has recently shown some new faces with initiative and energy, and we want to make sure the county and township work together to grab the big state dollars that can make it possible," Hampel said.



A lesson in patience and perseverance

Besides enhancing and promoting their own public parks, townships can capitalize on recreational opportunities and amenities already there. Rail trails, nature preserves, state parks, lakes, rivers, public beaches and boat launches strengthen ties to a community and draw vacationers.

"I think outdoor recreation is very important, whether it's a walking trail or a small township park," Gasperich said. "People can use it and see it and feel good about the township. We always get the complaints about garbage or trash. It's always nice to get credit for a nice trail or disc golf course or lakeshore park; it's always good to hear that."

Calumet Charter Township has many partners and volunteers in the community, from the Lions Club to the Swedetown Trails Club. "We don't take part in the day-to-day operation of the facility," Gasperich said of Swedetown Recreation Area. "We're just here in the background if they need us. When they need support, they come and find us."

Another tip is that nothing happens overnight. It can take decades to acquire land, build trails and connect multi-use trails. Often, a nonprofit "Friends" group is needed to help maintain them.

"Just be aware of what people are interested in and what's available," Gasperich said. "You have to start out with land and a year or two later get another grant to make improvements. It just takes time ... We never slow down on it. If we see something available, we work on it."

At the township level, sometimes politics can come into play. A lack of both financial and human capital can be real challenges. Collaboration is key. Working on the DCNA project has been a lesson in perseverance, promotion and partnerships, Hampel said.

"Talk with everyone," Hampel said. "Discover everyone's dreams and goals, and try to coalesce them into a simple plan that can be presented everywhere there are interested people."

The Friends of Fruitland Township Trails offers tours, walkabouts and activities with "rewards" for those who join the efforts. The group also created a Facebook page, and Hampel and other volunteers attend local business expos, Earth Day celebrations, and local festivals and events to promote the Friends group and DCNA.

"Most of my work in the past two years has been fundraising, joining various coalitions and recreation groups, and very importantly, building our partnership with the township that can do the things that we weary volunteers just can't do," she said.

Be creative and 'toot your own horn'

Townships need to be creative when it comes to funding sources. Another tip: always be on the lookout for resources — grants, gifts, donations, volunteer hours, Scout projects and fundraisers. Calumet Charter Township applied for

a grant to have 30 goats come up and eat the invasive plant buckthorn this summer. Besides state funding, many community foundations and health foundations will fund park and recreation improvements.

“We’re not a huge township, so to find \$50,000 or \$100,000 extra dollars to put in recreational items is sometimes a little bit of a struggle,” Gasperich said, noting the Portage Health Foundation awarded the township grants to fund playground equipment and improvements at Swedetown Recreation Area. The Calumet-Laurium-Keweenaw Rotary Club also helped establish a new park.

Heeres’ advice is to recruit people who are interested in your cause, whether it’s hiking, biking, kayaking or conservation, as well improving the township.

“If you want to build a bike trail, what you need is a person who is involved with bike trails to be the spark plug behind a project,” she said. “For me to try to promote a bike trail doesn’t make sense. You need somebody who is involved in the activity. You need people on your team with a variety of interests who are willing to work together for the common good.”

It’s important to bring in a variety of stakeholders: your local chamber of commerce, community foundation, business sponsors, regional trail groups, and neighboring townships and counties.

“It all goes together with economic development and tourism and having the right people on your team with a

variety of interests, backgrounds and experiences,” Heeres said. “Some of us have been doing this a long time, and we’re always looking for young, ambitious and energetic people to hand the torch to. It’s for the love for our community and wanting to do better for the people who live here—that’s the thing—and working with others.”

Faculak added that it’s good to get out and see what other communities are doing, but to come back and do a reality check. “What are your assets? Be who you are and capitalize on the assets you have,” she said. “We are an ag area here. We have farms and orchards; that’s a big part of our culture and who we are.”

Keep working to raise awareness, secure resources and find the right partners. Township officials and supporters have to be proactive and find ways to get the word out about what they are doing.

“Somebody said a long time if you don’t toot your own horn, nobody else will,” Heeres said. “That’s basically what we’re doing. We say ‘hey, look at us, look at what we’ve got.’ We can’t rely on others to promote our area; we have to do it.”



Marla Miller, Freelance writer

The advertisement is split into two main sections. The left section has a red background with white text for Merit CISO Consulting. The right section has a blue background with white and light blue text for the Michigan Broadband Summit. Both sections include QR codes and the URL MERIT.EDU/CISO.

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The four Cs: Adapting to firefighter training requirement changes

Changes to the Michigan Firefighters Training Council Act (Public Act 291 of 1966 as amended) and its associated administrative rules became effective Nov. 3, 2021. As explained in the August 2022 issue of *Township Focus*, these changes align training requirements with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, and ensure that firefighter and fire officer training meets today's needs and hazards. The changes are significant, and all townships should be aware of them and plan for their associated costs.

Volunteer or on-call firefighters are required to become trained and certified at the Firefighter 1 and Hazardous Materials Operations level within two years of hire. Career personnel must achieve Firefighter 2 certification within one year.

These changes align Michigan with other states, make Michigan training programs compatible with ProBoard®/IFSAC® accreditation standards, and ease reciprocity for those firefighters entering or leaving Michigan for career opportunities. Fortunately, fireworks safety funds cover much of the cost of firefighter training, which is coordinated by the state Bureau of Fire Services.

These enhancements make for better trained and qualified firefighters and fire officers, and ultimately more effective fire departments to serve our citizens. They also make recruiting and retaining fire and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel even more challenging. Townships need to be aware of these requirements and budget the necessary resources to address them.

Some townships have raised concerns that the increased training and education requirements, coupled with equipment replacement schedules in the revised MIOSHA Part 74 firefighting standard, are making it difficult to finance fire departments in small communities.

'The four Cs'

In planning for these challenges, the first step is always **Cooperation**. It is critical that each township work closely with not only its surrounding communities (such as through local MTA county chapters), but with communities across the state and beyond. The fire service is typically ahead of the curve in this area, as it has long-used "mutual aid" agreements and a standardized system of incident command. Fire departments also need an open line of communication with their peers across the county, state and nation. Active participation with county fire chiefs associations, and the Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs and its regional partners (Southeastern, Western, Northern and U.P. Divisions) is critical to remain up to date on an ever-changing profession.

One of the biggest advances in decades is the widespread use of the Michigan Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) system. MABAS now includes over 600 communities that pledge their help to others through divisions and special operations teams. MABAS resources from Metro Detroit helped at the recent Menominee paper plant fire, and an entire division from the Grand Traverse and Leelanau area moved to Gaylord to help with their tornado strike last year.

MABAS also streamlines local mutual aid by using "box cards" to pre-plan exactly what resources are agreed upon for initial alarms, and each escalating alarm level as an incident grows. Rather than stripping resources from all adjoining departments, box cards allow each to contribute a limited amount (ideally 20%) and gather additional help in an ever-widening circle.

Cooperation is the first step, and leaders must constantly remain alert for opportunities to work together. The next "C" is **Collaboration**. There are many fire department functions that can be shared among more than one department. Training is one easy example, but group purchasing and many administrative functions could be shared as well, reducing the costs to each department significantly.

Consolidation is the scary word that can be a viable option in these trying times. It is entirely possible that some communities may not be able to attract or promote a fire chief who meets the criteria or is able to spend the time training and preparing for this key role in the department. Perhaps more than one department could share a chief to lead them and handle the myriad of administrative responsibilities while station captains provide initial command at incidents. Consolidation could be done through an interlocal agreement, or through the creation of a PA 57 emergency services authority, which can even be formed with its own taxing capability. Examples of large, highly effective authorities include Brighton and Grand Traverse Metro, and smaller rural ones like Rogers City Area and Posen Area, each of which encompass several townships and do a terrific job for all their stakeholders.

Lastly, **Contracting** with a neighboring community may be a viable option. If a nearby fire department is capable of providing services for your area, it may be that contracting

Bureau of Fire Services Continuing Education (CE) Requirements (R 29.418)	Michigan Department of Health and Human Services EMS CE Requirements (Part 3, R 325.22321-325.22327)
Firefighters: 36 hours every three years; minimum six hours per year	Medical first responder: 15 CE credits (three-year cycle)
Officers: Additional 12 hours, specific to officer topics, i.e., professional conference	Emergency medical technician: 30 CE credits (three-year cycle)
Instructors: Additional 12 hours, specific to education topics	Paramedic: 45 CE credits (three-year cycle)
Fire chiefs: Minimum to become chief: Firefighter 2, Fire Officer 2, Fire Instructor 1	Instructor-coordinator: Additional 30 CE credits (three-year cycle)

for services is the best option in terms of assuring an efficient, effective emergency response for your citizens at a cost that your township can afford. If the situation changes or your community grows, you can always go back to operating your own department when appropriate.

Working to provide the best service possible

The acceptable standard for providing a given function, like fire protection, will inevitably advance over time as experience and science search out the most effective and safest methods and techniques. These advances are shared through training and education, and new tools are phased in to help apply this new knowledge.

The modern fire department, whether in a metropolitan area or a small rural township must keep abreast of these changes through journals, conferences and associations, and move forward as needed. Townships do well to appoint a proactive, well-prepared fire chief and communicate with them regularly, then work together to provide and facilitate the resources to assure the best possible emergency services for their constituents.

Chief Bill Forbush, EFO, Presque Isle Township (Presque Isle Co.) Fire Department

With over 40 years of full-time fire and EMS experience, Chief Forbush is past president of the Northern Michigan and Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs and is designated as an executive fire officer (EFO) by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Fire Academy. He is a paramedic and fire and EMS instructor-coordinator, and serves on the State of Michigan EMS Coordination Committee.

Forbush is working with MTA's Public Safety Advisory Committee and is leading efforts to revise and expand MTA's On-Call Fire Departments publication. Learn more from Forbush at "Emerging Issues in Emergency Services," MTA's full-day course being held Sept. 12 in Frankenmuth. Turn to page 24 for details or register today at www.michigantownships.org.

upcoming MTA workshop

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Emerging Issues in Emergency Services

A community that's truly prepared is one that's always looking ahead. This rings especially true in today's era of new and emerging threats. MTA can help you stay on top of the hot issues facing your fire department and emergency services personnel. Township board members, fire chiefs and officials, and anyone serving on your emergency services team is welcome at our annual event designed to provide both an update and a better understanding of current challenges.

Join MTA and a wide variety of experts—including State Fire Marshal Kevin Sehlmeier—at this full-day event **coming to the Bavarian Inn Lodge in Frankenmuth on Sept. 12**. Topics include:

- An update from the state Bureau of Fire Services and review of new training requirements, including mandatory minimums for fire chiefs
- Insights from the state Bureau of Emergency Preparedness, EMS, and Systems of Care on agency and vehicle inspections, equipment list changes, new education grants and more
- An overview of the newest policy updates required by MIOSHA to help ensure your township is in compliance
- The role of the modern fire chief, aligning responsibilities with expertise and expectations
- Keeping pace with the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS)

The event is held from 9 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. and includes a continental breakfast and lunch.



Join event sponsor Michigan Township Participating Plan for a bonus session with their experts, held from 4:15 to 4:45 p.m. Learn more about their services at www.theparplan.com.

Cancellations and Substitutions—Written cancellation requests must have been received at the MTA office by Aug. 28 to receive a full refund. No refunds will be issued after Aug. 28 without extenuating circumstances. You may substitute another individual from your township without incurring a charge; please notify MTA of the change.



Emerging Issues in EMS Registration Form

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Email

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\$150/person

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upcoming MTA events

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

2023 Professional Development Retreats

As a township leader, you are expected to have solutions for a wide variety of challenges. How do you ensure you're equipped to anticipate, and develop strategies to overcome, virtually any situation that arises in your community? Join fellow officials from across the state this fall at **The Highlands in Harbor Springs** for MTA's Professional Development Retreats. You'll walk away with insights tailored to your role in the township and connections that will last a lifetime!

Content, connections and camaraderie: Each retreat offers a learning experience geared to concepts, trends and pressing issues for townships. Most are designed specifically to your role in the township, while our all-new Strategy & Innovation Retreat offers a broader township perspective. Educational sessions are designed for officials at every level. Detailed descriptions for each retreat were mailed last month and are also available online at <https://bit.ly/MTAretreats>

Lodging: Housing is not included in retreat registration rates. Make your reservations with The Highlands at Harbor Springs directly. Room types, rates and online reservations available at <http://bit.ly/mtaretreats> OR call (800) 462-6963. When calling, reference "MTA Retreats" to obtain discounted rates.

Event sponsors:



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OCT. 3-4

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Cancellations and substitutions: Written cancellation requests received at the MTA office four weeks prior to the event will receive a full refund; two weeks prior will receive a half refund; and no refunds will be issued thereafter without extenuating circumstances. You may substitute another individual from your township for the same retreat. Contact MTA to let us know of the switch. Changes to hotel reservations must be made directly with The Highlands.

Registration Form

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Check the day you wish to attend: Day 1 OR Day 2

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TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$ _____

Above rates are for MTA members; non-members, call MTA for rates.



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A economic conditions and outlook update

This article is the second in a series providing an economic outlook for Michigan and the U.S. to offer considerations for your township, and share broader community, state and national implications.

The main economic story over the past two years has been the rise of inflation in the United States and globally.

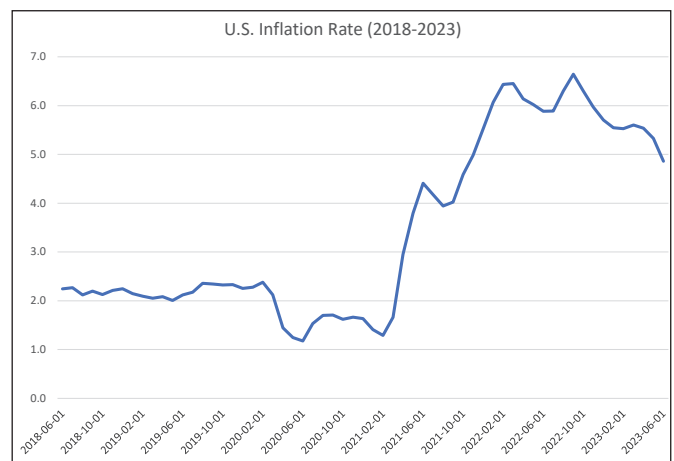
Throughout 2022, inflation had peaked at nearly 7%—over a 30-year high in the U.S. Various explanations were provided for this inflationary pressure, including an expansion of the money supply and major disruptions in the supply chain due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The chart at right shows the inflation pattern over the last five years.

Digging into the numbers

There has been good news on the inflation front over the past few months. Inflation has begun to subside falling to 4% in June 2023. This included the smallest increases of only .2% in a month-to-month measure since 2021. Digging into the numbers, we find that energy prices continue to be volatile. Over the past 12 months, gasoline and natural gas indexes had fallen whereas the electricity index was up.

The main price pressures continue to come from the housing sector where prices continue to rise despite a weakening economy. Perhaps another big story less talked about, medical care inflation continues to remain very low. This was major source of price increase over the past decades and yet since the pandemic, medical prices have been stagnant.

The Federal Reserve, and many other macroeconomic forecasters, are no longer expecting a recession to occur in the United States over the next year. As Fed Chairman Jerome Powell remarked in July 2023, “The staff now has a noticeable slowdown in growth starting later this year (2023)



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

in the forecast. But given the resilience of the economy recently, they are no longer forecasting a recession.” This is a major change from just a few months ago where many were expecting the U.S. to fall into recessionary territory later this year. The main reason was that interest rate hikes were expected and have made capital and borrowing much more expensive for both households and businesses.

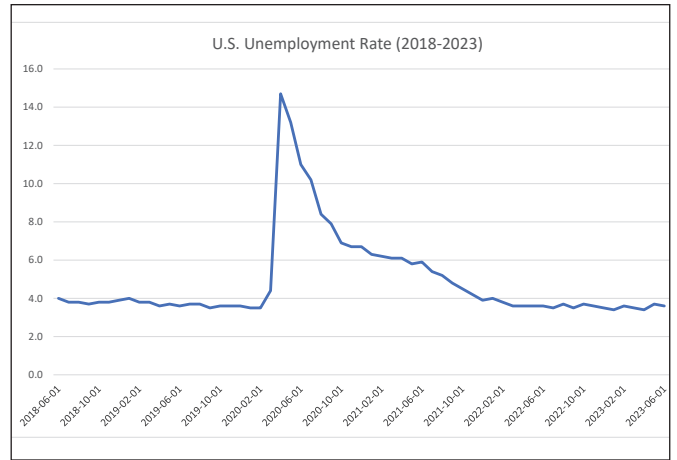
Consumer spending has been much stronger after the pandemic than before it. This is surprising as many expected consumer spending would rapidly decline as pandemic relief

measures began to fall away in 2022. Several measures of consumer confidence continue to remain strong despite some headwinds from inflation. Deloitte noted in July 2023 that its measures see consumers as remaining quite buoyant, especially as inflation has subsided. The University of Michigan's much-tracked consumer confidence index has also shown strength, especially in the last few months. All of these indicators point toward ongoing resiliency, albeit at a slower pace in consumer spending, which will be a major factor impacting the employment markets.

Unemployment reaches record lows

Another big reason for stability in consumer confidence is the ongoing growth and stability in the employment market. The national unemployment rate reached another record low of 3.6% this summer. We should recall that the unemployment rate hit a post-war high of almost 15% in the summer 2020. The chart at right shows the wild swings in unemployment over the course of the pandemic and afterwards from 2018 through summer 2023.

These unemployment numbers can be contrasted to what is called the labor force participation rate. This rate measures the number of people either in or out of the workforce. To be counted as in the workforce, you must be actively looking for a job or have a job. Anyone in the prime working ages of 15 to 64 who is not looking for a job is not counted as part of the workforce. During the pandemic in 2022, labor force participation fell to 60.1%. It has since recovered to about 62.6% by this summer, which remains nearly 1% below where



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

it was as of the early part of 2020 before the pandemic. This implies that about 1.6 million remain out of the workforce as compared to 2020, and remains a potential concern related to supply side disruptions in certain industries.



Eric Scorsone, Ph.D., Director, Extension Center for Local Government Finance and Policy, Michigan State University



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aroundthe**state**

townships in the spotlight



Torch Lake Township

Many know **Torch Lake Township** (Antrim Co.) as a sought-after summer getaway spot famous for its clear blue-green namesake lake. While the water certainly is stunningly beautiful, the township has a lot to offer in its 21 square miles. Home to more than 1,200 full-time residents, the population increases during the summer months with vacationers and summer residents. Nestled between Lake Michigan's Grand Traverse Bay and Torch Lake, the community continues to flourish due to the year-round natural beauty, high quality of life and low cost of living.



Once named the third most beautiful lake in the entire world by *National Geographic* magazine, Torch Lake is pristine and crystal clear with multi-hued blue water. The lake, roughly two miles wide, is Michigan's longest and deepest inland lake. Filled with a variety of fresh water fish including lake trout, rock bass, yellow perch, small-mouth bass, pike, brown trout, rainbow trout and whitefish, the lake is a dream for the fishing community. The lake is also used for boating, beaches and water sports.

Whether residents and visitors want to visit the nature preserve, take in a sunset or spend the day at the park, the township lands and waters are clean and fresh. Visitors are often overwhelmed by the fresh scents of the variety of pine trees. Situated on East Grand Traverse Bay, the Torch Bay Nature Preserve is just one of many places to enjoy the outdoors while exploring both the shores and the woods. Used year-round for birding, hiking, snowshoeing and swimming, the preserve includes marked trails as well as a viewing platform to take in the sights.

While visitors are always welcomed, the township is intended to feel like home. It is simple, beautiful and just the way the community likes it. The township is rich with pride and encourages residents to get involved and share in their love of their home.



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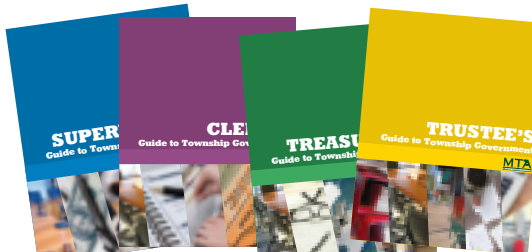
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